The future of strategic crisis management in the EU

Introduction
The risk landscape has undergone a substantial transformation in recent years, due to co-occurrence of factors including the COVID pandemic, shifts in the geopolitical landscape, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and increasingly visible consequences of climate change. These complex, interrelated, creeping and global challenges have had a profound impact within and outside of the borders of the European Union, underscoring the imperative for enhanced *strategic crisis management* and *civil protection* at EU level.

The responsibility for effective crisis management, ensuring the safety, security, preparedness and resilience rests with individual Member States. However, as crises are becoming more cross-border, cross sectoral and complex, with multiple layers of impact, the European dimension has become indispensable and an integral component of crisis management. Therefore, building on the recommendation of the EU Commission's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors[1] we propose the following suggestions to strengthen the interplay between national responsibilities and European cooperation.

Horizontal Working Party on EU Crisis Management
The formation of a *Horizontal Working Party on EU Crisis Management* is necessary to address the existing gaps in this field. This body within the Council can provide a comprehensive platform for addressing the entire crisis management cycle holistically, from risk awareness to preparedness, and response to lessons learned. This Horizontal Working Party on Crisis Management can serve as the central dedicated platform for continuous and consistent discussions and preparing the Council's position on the full crisis management cycle. Moreover, creating an EU crisis management community is an equally significant benefit of establishing this Working Party. This complex field of work needs an expert community which can maintain an overall view concerning governance aspects of EU crisis management and is capable of identifying fundamental and institutional matters. This is important because EU crisis management is integrally linked with national crisis management and national security. Ultimately, this Working Party bridges the gaps between disaster risk management, resilience building, crisis management and civil protection, highlighting the interconnectedness of EU crisis management with nation crisis management and national security.

Future of the DG Network of Crisis Centra
The Netherlands advocates for the integration of the DG Network of EU crisis centra into the Council structure. By positioning the DG Network as high-level group administering the Horizontal Working Party on Crisis Management, responsible for overseeing the development of *Integrated Political Crisis Response* (IPCR), we can enhance continuity and focus on the Network's strategic, long-term views.

Building the EU crisis management community and ramp up MS participation
At the same time, a responsibility lies with the Member States to ensure suitable expert representation in EU crisis management forums. The effectiveness of some EU crisis management groups has been hindered by rapid rotations of representatives or the lack of a dedicated national experts. Fostering an EU crisis management community with experts well-versed in both national crisis management and EU affairs is paramount. This will not only bolster the Council's position but also enhance the quality of the interaction with the Commission and the overall effectiveness of EU crisis management.

Professionalisation of IPCR
Professionalizing IPCR is essential in the current risk landscape. We thank and commend the Council Secretariat and previous presidencies for their efforts in this regard. Nevertheless, in the current risk landscape it is clear that further steps are necessary. In order to realise the full potential of IPCR and for it to assume the role of fully functional counterpart to the Commission, providing political guidance during crises, we must:
1) <u>Grant Member State's delegates a clear mandate</u> and formalizing the role and responsibilities of participating nations within IPCR meetings.
2) <u>Ensure alignment of national crisis structures with the EU's</u> as much as possible and useful, taking MS's individual national crisis architecture in consideration, to ensure timely coordination of input on IPCR meetings in times of crises to stimulate synergy, resulting in more effective crisis management.

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[1] "Strengthening European governance for strategic crisis management will require the creation of more cohesive, supportive and complementary mechanisms for preparedness, response, and recovery, developing stronger synergies across European institutions and between European Institutions and Member States." European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, (2022). Strategic crisis management in the EU: improving EU crisis prevention, preparedness, response and resilience, Publications Office of the European Union.

3)   <u>Conducting regular crisis management exercises</u> within IPCR, based on an integrated approach to foresight and emphasizing forward-looking strategies, will prepare participants for real-time scenarios and encourage proactive measures.

The proliferation of sectoral crisis instruments

Tackling crises effectively requires clear rules and working arrangements. This includes preventing the duplication of tasks and responsibilities. The Commission's introduction of sector-specific crisis instruments and provisions[2] has created an increasingly complex EU crisis management environment. The work field lacks cohesion, harmony and mutual awareness among sectoral instruments, as well as between sectoral instruments and the IPCR as cross-sectoral steering body. Member States must be capable of navigating this complex landscape strategically and should be able to implement and execute different mechanisms in practice which requires clarity about the mutual relation of the different crisis instruments.

Building on the overview of all sectoral crisis instruments compiled by the Commission[3], we request the Commission to note per thematic crisis, step by step, the possible chronological actions encompassing all (possible activations of) groups within sectoral crisis instruments (or protocols etc) and the interconnection between IPCR and other instruments where necessary. Such a documented structure could serve as a script and form the basis for regular, much needed (cross-sectoral) crisis management exercises and possibly a training programme for (national) experts.

Joint Situation-Awareness Centre

In the State-of-the-Union 2022, mention has been made of the creation of a Joint Situation-Awareness Centre. Such a centre, operating under the responsibility of the ERCC, in close cooperation with the national crisis centres, could help sensemaking of developments (potentially) amounting to an 'EU Crisis'.

Civil protection and its connection to crisis management

Civil protection is progressively intertwined with the broader framework of crisis management in the EU. In recent years, EU citizens experienced many effects of the aforementioned challenges such as climate change, COVID-19 and rising geopolitical tensions. To enhance the effectiveness of EU crisis management, the European *Union Civil Protection Mechanism* (UCPM), including the Civil Protection Pool (CPP) should be strengthened and the ERCC enhanced.

1)   <u>A stronger UCPM</u>: Ongoing efforts are dedicated to fortifying the UCPM, acknowledging its pivotal role in promoting cross-border cooperation and facilitating a harmonised response to disasters and emergencies. While recognizing that we may not possess all the answers at this point in time, the urgent need to prepare for the future calls upon Member States and the Commission to catalyse discussions regarding the UCPM's evolution.

2)   <u>CPP futureproofed, ensuring rescEU's nature of last resort</u>: There is a growing consideration to bolster the CPP, potentially through the use of gap analyses based on future risks. Emphasizing the primary responsibility of Member States, a strengthened CPP ensures that rescEU remains a measure of last resort. This is without prejudice to the value of economies of scale that rescEU can offer in various domains.

3)   <u>ERCC as the main operational EU crisis hub</u>: ERCC should have a broader mandate to serve as the dedicated EU crisis hub in the Commission. The current set-up of the ERCC is very successful. It provides fast deployment of operational teams and has the potential to serve as central operational information point for the EU.

Concluding

In conclusion, this paper underscores the imperative for enhanced strategic crisis management in the European Union. The proposed establishment of a Horizontal Working Party on EU Crisis Management within the Council, along with measures to professionalize crisis response and improve coordination, presents a strategic path forward. Strengthening civil protection mechanisms (and stimulating more tie-ins with crisis management), and harmonizing sector-specific crisis instruments are vital steps towards a more integrated and effective crisis management framework. By embracing these initiatives, the EU can better prepare for the multifaceted challenges of the future and improve the safety and security of its citizens.

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[2] Such as (in) SMEI, HERA, Chips Act, NIS2, Data Act, DORA, EFSCM, CRM Act, 122 TFEU, CER Directive and many more.
[3] WK 5108/2023 INIT